

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH MAJOR GENERAL DAVID HOGG,  
DEPUTY COMMANDER-ARMY, NATO TRAINING MISSION-AFGHANISTAN SUBJECT: AFGHAN  
ARMY'S CURRENT STATUS MODERATOR: LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG, U.S. NAVY,  
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LT. CRAGG: Okay. Without further ado, I'd like to welcome you  
all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Thursday,  
February 18th, 2010.

My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the  
Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs and I'll be moderating the call  
today.

A note to the bloggers and online journalists: Please remember  
to state your name and the organization you're with prior to asking your  
questions.

And also, if you have to put your phone on hold while we're  
conducting the roundtable, please exit the call and call back in. We'll  
hear your hold music if you do. And also, if possible, please put your  
phone on mute and that way we won't hear the background noise from your  
end.

With that, we're here today with Major General David Hogg. He's  
the deputy commander-Army, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan and he's  
going to be talking about the Afghan Army current status, future builds  
and challenges.

So without further ado, I'm going to turn it over to Major  
General David Hogg. He can start with an opening statement and then  
we'll go to questions.

Sir, the floor is yours.

GEN. HOGG: Okay, thank you.

A good thing it's a blogger. It's actually Hogg because it's a  
long O, but I'm used to it after all these years.

Like I said, I've been here now in CSTC-A -- actually, in Afghanistan for about -- starting month number nine. I spent two months as the DECOS OP at the ISAF headquarters and then we went through the restructuring where we split out a third three-star headquarters and then we developed and stood up NTM-A and I came over here to be a deputy.

My primary responsibility is everything to do with army development and training. I also cover down on the medical training advisory group, the logistical training advisory group and the thing that's called the regional support teams, which are teams that are out in each of the regions -- regional command areas and the core areas providing the support to AMSF in terms of infrastructure, equipment, you name it. They're kind of -- they're all representative out in the regional areas.

What I'd like to talk about real quick and then open up for questions is just kind of where we're at right now with the army, where we're going to go with the army and then some of the issues that we deal with here in Afghanistan with the army on a daily basis.

Currently, we're about 104K -- 104,000 in strength, which puts us on glide path right now, as we speak, to hit 134(,000) in October 31st of 2010. We run regional basic warrior training centers. That's basically our basic training command in each of the regions. We just stood up two more -- one in Kandahar and one in Herat. They're temporary facilities until the permanent facilities get built. And they can take 1,400 recruits at a time. And right now, we've got over 17,000 recruits in basic training today as I speak.

And overall, when we throw in our other schools from the NCO and the officers side, counterinsurgency, command and general staff college, we've got a total of almost 20,000 Afghan army folks in training right now. And that does not take into consideration the guys that are out in the operational area fighting every day.

A couple organizations that we have that don't get a lot of attention is our commando training program. That is similar to our ranger training program, if you will. And we deploy those guys as kandaks or battalions. And they are -- they are absolutely top-of-the-line units as far as the army goes. They are partnered with the Special Forces guys. They will actually partner up with a new battalion as they get ready to go through training. They will go through the training with the Afghans and then they will deploy to their operational area -- wherever that kandak is designed to go. And so that partnering piece really makes a difference as far as the quality of the force -- plus, they get a little bit -- they get some different equipment. They get some Gucci equipment compared to the rest of the Afghan national army -- specifically night vision devices.

And then we have an another one that is an Afghan partner unit and that is kind of a CT capability, and they're out doing operations every day as well. And I won't go much more into that.

The other one that's part of the Army program is our army -- Afghan army air corps. And they're in operations today. We're training -- their primary rotor-wing aircraft is the Mi-17. For the military buffs out there, that's basically the Mi-8 that's been upgraded to fly and fight or operate in this environment. It's a Russian aircraft and it is absolutely the right air frame for this environment. They are involved in operations down in central Helmand today as I speak and we'll get a growth -- right now, we'll probably go to about 56 when the total program is done.

In addition to the Mi-17, we do have some Mi-35s, which is basically the attack helicopters. We'll phase those out. We only have about six of those, and we'll phase that out over time and replace it with something else -- probably a propeller-type fixed-wing platform.

And then the last thing, which is a great new story, is the T-27As, which is a miniature version of a C-130 if you want to put it in perspective. We've got three of those right now. The Afghans are going through pilot training. It takes awhile to grow pilots and they are currently in training. We don't see those really going operational, if you will, probably until this summer just on the fact that we need to have the training base.

For the future, our growth is going to be 171.6. And the target date for that is 31 October 2011. I'll talk about some of the issues, and one of those, of course, is recruiting.

Right now we're doing very well in recruiting. It's actually -- in December we had over 8,800 recruits, which is over double what the Afghans have ever produced in the past. We're also in a high recruiting season here in Afghanistan. So the real test on whether or not the Afghans can make the numbers is going to start happening probably in the April-May time frame when we hit the spring/summer. Traditionally, that's been a low recruiting time period, we'll see how that goes.

But right now, the Afghans are saying they're going to make their numbers. So far they have, in fact, made their numbers. We're bursting at the seams for training. That's a good thing; it's also a bad thing, because it forces us to work the infrastructure very hard.

We'll also work on rebalancing this army. We made a conscious decision back in July to push more of the infantry-type forces to get them COIN enabled. And we pushed some of the enablers -- read artillery, armor, whatever -- to the right. And so at some point, we'll rebalance this army compared to what it is today.

Real quick on some of the issues: Leadership. Developing leaders -- that is a big deal. It's a main effort for us both on the officer and NCO corps. It takes awhile to build leaders, and so we're working that very hard, but it's a challenge.

We do have a military academy here. It's a four-year program. In fact, in March -- the March 16th will be a graduation class of 213 new cadets. They'll graduate and then on March 22nd, we'll start the next

class of 600 new cadets that will be enrolled and we'll go through a four-year program and every year we'll start cranking out brand new lieutenants from the military academy.

We also have an OCS program, as well as our noncommissioned officer education program to include a sergeant majors academy.

Personnel system is a challenge right now. We're working real hard with partnering with the GSG1 here at Kabul, but it's everything from making sure that we have the right folks at the right location, to pay -- it's anything you can think about on a personnel system, we're working through and a lot of work left to be done. It's a challenge.

The logistical system is another one. We work the core level -- or excuse me -- the army-level depots here in Kabul and we push them out to forward support depots in regional logistic centers within the different regional commands. And where we have the challenge is probably core and below as far as logistical resupply. Part of that, once again, is because those enablers were pushed a little bit to the right. And we're starting to crank out some of the combat service support and combat support formations won't be starting until probably summer/fall time.

The Afghan trainers -- just like TRADOC in the states where TRADOC has been cut on their manning, we have the same challenges here as far as getting folks out of the fight into the training environment. And what we're trying to do is get the Afghans to rotate fresh with combat experience and get combat experience in the training center.

They're starting to get it. The minister of Defense is getting it, the chief of staff is getting it and so we're working that one real hard.

And then finally, the last one I'll mention is we've got a lot of old, unserviceable ammunition here in Afghanistan. We know of 5,900 metric tons worth of unserviceable ammunition, and we're working very hard with the minister to give us permission to destroy this stuff so we don't have a CIVCAS incident if this stuff was to have a catastrophic detonation, and to provide us more space as we replace it with other, newer ammunition. And so that's a constant struggle for us right now. We're working it from every angle you can think of to allow the force of the Afghans to allow us to destroy this stuff.

And you know, of course, you and I we sit here and go, well, what's the big deal? Well, the big deal is this country's been at war 30 years and there is a hoarding mentality. And this excess ammo -- this unserviceable stuff, some of it's 30-40 years old -- it's considered a national treasure. And what we're trying to do is anything above 14.5 we want to be able to destroy and replace it with new stuff. The small arms that are in cans -- it's not an issue as far as civilian casualty potential goes, at least from our perspective. And with that, I'll open it up to questions.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you so much, sir.

Let's go to Andrew. Andrew, you're first.

I know that a number of people have called in. When we get through Troy, I'll bring the rest on.

So Andrew, please go ahead.

Q Great, thank you.

General, Andrew Lubin from Leatherneck Magazine and also Jane's Intelligence.

Sir, with spinning the Afghan army up to 104,000 now and up to 134,000 in the next few months, are you building more kandaks or forming larger ones? There was a school of thought that larger kandaks are better, because with a finite amount of senior enlisted, it's easier to train the young recruits.

GEN. HOGG: Great question. Actually, we're doing all of it.

Actually, we're doing all of it. We pushed in extra companies; in fact, we cranked out 18 additional companies to push into the brigades and the battalions. We do what's called a fills -- we overfill the units, and so we have individual fills, if you will, that we push out as we are also building the additional kandaks as we round out the course. We're just setting up another corps, the 215th Corps, brand new corps that's being designed and that will be primarily stationed in the Helmand Province area, and so like I said, we're doing all of it, because it's easier to build companies than individual fillers because of the leadership requirement, but we still have to keep the structure going. So like I said we're doing all of those. Over.

Q : Okay. General, will you be assigning 215th to the new RC Southwest? Is that the plan overall?

GEN. HOGG: It is going to go in that area. (Laughs.) I'll just leave it at that, but it will be -- basically you'll have the 205th Corps in Kandahar, you'll have the 215th Corps basically in the Helmand/Nimroz area.

Q Okay, great. Perfect, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Andrew. Dale, you're next. Please go ahead.

MR. KISSINGER Yes, sir, General Hogg. This is Dale Kissinger from MilitaryAvenue.com, and I had a concern about the retention. We're having a lot of success stories, we're hearing a lot about that, but then occasionally we hear about retention issues. After the soldiers are trained in the system, what kind of retention problems are you having right now?

GEN. HOGG: Another great question. Right now our targeted is 1.2 percent annually is what we want to target them for retention --

excuse me, attrition. We'll talk attrition first as it's attrition, retention and recruiting. The attrition rate is about 1.9 right now, so it's a little bit higher than what we want. That means that we have to crank in more in the recruiting base. The attrition is sitting at 67.9 percent right now. You probably are going, well, how do you know it's 67.9 percent? Because we track it every day.

We have a band between 60 and 70 percent. If they hit within that band we're in pretty good shape. So right now we have to focus more on the attrition. It's important that folks understand that attrition is just not focused on soldiers going AWOL. It's AWOL, it's those killed in action, it's those that are seriously wounded and unable to continue their military service. So right now the key piece that we're working hard on with the Afghans is the attrition rate. That one is too high from our perspective.

The pay raise that we did back in December has had a great effect as far as recruiting. We jumped the pay up \$45 bucks so it got them up to 165 (dollars) base pay. Then when they go -- depending where they're assigned to, if they're down in Helmand, which is a red province, red district area, they'll get about \$75 extra a month. If it's a moderate area, yellow, we color code it in conjunction with the Afghans -- it's about \$65 extra. And if they're in a green area, they don't get the combat pay, if you will.

And so that pay increase we've done has helped tremendously on the recruiting side. On the attrition and retention side, it helps a little bit but it's really leadership that's going to fix that, and that's what we're harping on to the Afghans, is we've got to fix the leadership. Good leaders will keep the soldiers in for the most part. Over.

Q Thank you very much, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Dale. Beth, you're next. Please go ahead.

Q This is Beth Wilson from Homefront in Focus. Thank you for your time this morning. My first question is in regard to the literacy rate. How does that impact your training, what are you doing to overcome that challenge? We're quite aware that across Afghanistan, huge illiteracy rates.

GEN. HOGG: That is a fact. A couple things. I'll tell you about the program, but one of the things to take into consideration is the illiteracy rate here in Afghanistan is high, or the illiterate rate. And they -- they function pretty good even though they're not to what we would look at it from a Western standard. And so we've always got to put that in perspective. Now as far as what we're doing to attack this thing. We're starting what we call basically zero week for the basic trainees. We'll bring them in two weeks earlier and we will give them basic reading, writing in Dari so they are able to at least write their name, read their serial number on their weapon, et cetera.

And then we have literacy programs that we are starting. We run it here in Kabul, we're also -- we'll start a program where we push it down to the corps, kind of like our old (B-Step ?) Program we used to run back in the early '80s to work on the education side of the house. Education is a big deal with the Afghans. In fact, you talk to soldiers, that is -- the more we can give them on education, the more we'll keep them in, because they want to learn. And then of course when you go to the aviation side of the house, English language is a big deal for pilots because the international language for the aviators is English.

And so not only do we have the literacy piece that we've got to make sure they're qualified before they come into the Air Corps, we also run an English -- excuse me -- English language -- okay, I think I'm back. But sorry about that (coughing).

Q I choked you up.

GEN. HOGG: Okay, I'm back to normal. We also run an English-language training program through DOI, and so we're attacking that. It's an issue, and it's not going to get fixed overnight. Over. (Laughs.)

Q Thank you, sir. Appreciate that.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Beth. Chuck, you're next. Please go ahead.

Q Yes, Chuck Simmons from America's Northshore Journal. General Hogg, can you talk about the ethnic breakdown of the military currently, and how the differences in language and culture are being addressed within the military?

GEN. HOGG: I can. Amazing you bring this up, because it's been an item of conversation here for the last -- last couple of weeks with the Ministry of Defense and the minister himself. What we have -- first of all, there's not been a survey as far as the population in quite some time, so there's a lot of data out there. You've got a CI database, you've got a AIMS database, you've got a DOD database, a lot of databases out there as far as what the ethnic breakdown here in Afghanistan is.

The Minister of Defense has laid out a specific piece on what the targeted rates are. It had to do with the Pashtuns, the Tajiks, the Uzbek, Hazaras and the others. The big one is on the Pashtuns and Tajiks. I've got some guys -- they're going to get me the actual data points, but it's about 47 percent for the Pashtuns, 27 percent for the Tajiks, plus or minus 5 (percent), and then for the other ethnic groups it's a plus or minus 2 (percent), and I'll get you the exact numbers here.

Right now it is a very sensitive issue because there is still a lot of -- it's a sensitive, emotional issue between the Tajiks and the Pashtuns for a whole variety of reasons. And so based on what the Minister of Defense gave us actually yesterday, we've actually put out to our training base to say, hey. Here's the standard. We do it already with the Army and we -- we do it fairly well. We're a little -- we're

high on the Tajiks in some areas for leaders and NCOs and officers, but when the guys go through basic we get all these recruits in, they go through the ethnic washing machine before they go into basic training, so we form these units based on the percentages that the Afghans have agreed to, and that's how we start training them, and that's how we form the kandaks.

We do the same ethnic balancing with the leadership, but it is a -- it is a challenge. Our biggest challenge is with the -- with the Pashtuns from the South. We don't have a lot of Pashtuns from the South, so that's a targeted area for us for recruiting, and we've got -- actually an Afghan recruiting command. The percentages right now for Pashtun is 44 percent is the target, plus or minus 5. For the Tajiks it's 25 percent plus or minus 5. Hazaras is 10 percent, plus or minus 2 (percent), Uzbek 8 percent plus or minus 2 (percent), and then all others is 13 percent plus or minus 2 (percent).

They changed it to plus or minus 2 (percent) to give more -- take more positions for the Hazaras, the Uzbeks and the others, kind of a -- in fact, the minister was talking an affirmative action program yesterday, which I thought was very insightful. But it's work in progress; we've got to balance out the Pashtuns right now, and there are some plans to potentially bring in some of the former Muj, Pashtun Muj from the South. We actually have a Muj training probably; it's an eight-week program we put them through. And our target is the junior leader officer level. We'll put them through a course and get them integrated into the formation. So that's pretty much where we're at right now. Over.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Chuck. Before I go to Richard, Spencer Ackerman had sent me an email and he wanted to clarify one thing that you said, sir. He said, "How many metric tons of old ammo did you say that was in place in Afghanistan?" Can you restate that, sir?

GEN. HOGG: Yes, 5,900 metric tons of ammunition that is what we consider old and unserviceable. You go by -- a lot of this is former Soviet stuff. If you go by the Soviet standards, for the stuff that's greater than 14.5 millimeter, it's about a 15-year lifespan, and then it starts to degrade and corrode. For small arms, it's about 20 years. Over.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir, and I'm sure Spencer will say thank you.

Richard, please go ahead.

Q Hello, this is Richard Lowry with Op4.com and Examiner.com. General, back in April of 2004, fledging Iraqi forces broke and ran when they were attacked on their way to the fight in Fallujah. And then later in Operation Phantom Fury in the fall, there was a mixed bag of results with Iraqi forces. Some of the units were very good and



others were suspect. I wonder if you could try to draw some comparisons with the Afghan forces that are fighting in Operation Moshtarak now to give us some sense of the success of the training of the Afghan forces?  
GEN. HOGG: Very interesting question.

I was in Iraq 2003 to 2004, and we worked the ICDC, the Iraqi Civil Defense Force. We had more success, actually, with our police because we were partnered with them.

When I look at what they're doing right now, the army -- the Afghan army is in pretty good shape. These guys are good fighters. They can actually shoot. What they lack really is good leadership. And so with the partnering that they're doing, with the Marines, the Brits, the Canadians and the rest of the Coalition Forces here, is making a difference.

I have not heard of any incident where the Afghan armies, on this current operation, have not anted-up. Now, I haven't been down there to take a look at it, so I'm telling you just stuff that I've seen in reporting. But the places that I have been -- and one of the beauties of this job is I do get to get out and about -- they're not bad troops. They're just -- they're lacking, in some cases, in leadership, and that's where the partnering piece really pays off.

I'm taking a trip this weekend to go down and check out some of the forces and see how they're doing, to bring back lessons to our training base. But so far it's a pretty good-news story, and I know that the Afghan leadership is very excited and very satisfied with the performance thus far of the Afghan forces. Over.

Q Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Richard.

Let's go to Laurie. Please go ahead, Laurie.

Q Yes, General, I was wondering if you could talk to us about Taliban snipers, if you could address that, and how are they trained, how pervasive are they?

GEN. HOGG: Well, I'll put it this way: I don't have a clue, okay?

I've seen the little banners on the Al-Jazeera English, and some of the other news things, and I read the reports daily. Are they out there? Yes. How well they're trained? I don't have a clue. I just don't know that because it's so far outside of what we're doing here on the training side of the house that it's really a question for the guys at the Afghan joint command -- or the ISAF Joint Command Forces and the regional commanders.

I may have a better answer for you after this weekend when I go down there and actually get to talk to, and roll round a little bit with the commandos. But I don't have anything -- other anecdotal for you. Over.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Laurie.

Nathan, please go ahead.

Q Hi, General. It's Nathan Hodge, with Wired.com.

I've got another question about pay. How are Afghan soldiers actually taking their paychecks home? Do they actually have to hand-carry cash back to their home towns? And does that become an issue, as far as people going AWOL when they go away on leave?

GEN. HOGG: Yeah, pay -- my favorite subject, next to Afghan boots.

Okay, on the pay side of the house, what we've done -- one of the things, one of the criteria with the pay raise is, as a new recruit comes in, he goes electronic fund transfer. Now, that's great if you're in a big city area where you got access to a bank, but some of these guys out in the hinterlands do not have access.

So it's really a combination. What we want to do is minimize a large amount of cash moving about the battlefield, because when you do that it gets siphoned off -- it gets taxed enroute. And so we have electronic fund transfer. There are ways where the soldiers can, in fact, get their family the money, either through giving them the authority or even working with some of the hawalas. In some cases, they do have to go home and pay, or get money to their families.

So it's kind of a combination of all those. The ideal thing is we get the rotational policy working, which is kind of a "red-green-amber" program similar to what we did in the Army, where when you're green, you're out there fighting, when you're amber, you're training, and when you're red, you're on leave. It works real well with the commando forces. We haven't been able to get that instituted yet with the whole Afghan army because we don't have the numbers yet, and we're starting to build these (fourth ?) kandaks that will give those corps commanders opportunity to rotate folks in and out.

But it is an issue, and it's one that we continue to work. Over. Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Nathan.

Troy, you're next. Please go ahead.

Q Hey, sir. How you doing? This is Troy Steward from Bouhammer.com and YouServed.com

You mentioned attrition recruiting, and you hit on leadership a couple of times. With the form ETT, I can understand it. So let me ask you, what has been done to put in place a fair and balanced UCMJ system of some type? And our senior leaders, especially those officers that kind of bought their position in the early days of the Afghan army, are they being held accountable? Are they being made examples of? And is that -- and, if so, is that making a difference?

GEN. HOGG: Another good question, and a tough one.

The facts are positions are still being bought. I can't give you grand-jury evidence to say that -- you know, to prove that, but it is happening. The key on this piece for the leadership, and holding them accountable, and getting the leadership -- the right leaders in the right place, will be a thing called the "inherent law" in the break-out of a retirement policy.

Right now there is not a retirement policy for the Afghan army. They did a retirement policy for the former mujes, or the former Afghan freedom fighters, which is very -- was very minimal. And that is something that we're working through their national security council, through the embassy and through ISAF to get this thing pushed through. Because I think what we'll find is, once we get a retirement policy in, we will be able to get the -- we will be able to get the new blood moved in.

The youngsters -- company and battalion commanders, and even a lot of the platoon leaders, they get it, they understand it, and they want to move forward. And I think that's going to make a big difference once that gets enacted. Until then, we'll get -- we continue to work the leadership side of the house. We're actually running seminars with their leaders here in the MOD world, and we're working it down to the corps commanders.

But it is still an issue, and it is one that will not be fixed over night. And that is why it continues to be a main effort for us here in TMA CSTC-A. Over.

Q So if I understand correctly, there is no UCMJ in place?

GEN. HOGG: Okay, on the UCMJ, they have a UCMJ system. It's a high-level -- we'll call it a court-martial-level system. What we're working on right now with our JAG advisers is something that's more like the Article 15-level all the way down.

They have a quasi-system. The problem is it's not being enforced. It's not being executed all the time. They are starting to work some of these -- I mean, we've had some guys fired and arrested recently for issues of corruption or incompetency, but we've still got a

ways to go. There is a system. It just doesn't get -- doesn't get used the way you and I are used to, a system of self-policing, if you will. Over.

Q Thank you, sir. Appreciate that.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Troy.

Now, I think there's three more on the call. We'll get to those folks. I believe it's Greg, Sharon and Spencer -- correct?

Q Yes.

Q Yes.

Q Sure.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, I don't know who called in, so I apologize.

I'm going to take a stab in the dark, I'm going to go with Greg first. So go ahead.

Q General, you mentioned your -- the muj training efforts down South in the Pashtun area. Is that a -- is that a former Taliban reintegration effort?

GEN. HOGG: No, it is not. It is strictly the former mujahideen. And these guys are pretty much what we would call probably the inactive reserve. And they're getting a little long in the tooth, but they have some leadership experience.

And so one of the things the minister of defense had mentioned, and also the chief of staff has, there's about 2(000) to 3,000 of these folks out there that we can potentially bring into the army. We bring them up to Kabul where we run the program at the Kabul Military Training Center, and we put them through an eight-week training program, part of reintegrating them into a battalion, a corps, or a brigade.

But it is not Taliban reintegration. That has not hit, as far as how we would do that. It is an Afghan issue right now and it will be an Afghan solution. Over.

Q But are you planning, at some point, to bring in former Taliban? GEN. HOGG: If the mission comes up and they say, hey, we got "little-T" guys that want to be part of the program, then what we would probably do is take our mujahideen integration course, and we would modify and use the same program that we're currently using with the former mujahideen to work that.

But, like I said, that is speculation on my part right now, because it has not -- it has not hit the airwaves here yet, as far as how that would actually take place. It's being worked at a higher level.

Q Okay.

GEN. HOGG: But we're prepared to put the program together if that, in fact, becomes the situation.

Q And finally, just quickly, what percentage would you say are former -- Afghan soldiers were former mujahideen?

GEN. HOGG: Huh. (Laughs.) Oh, man --

Q Just, roughly, a stab. Even a --

GEN. HOGG: Yeah, I think when you look at -- first of all, when you look at the army overall, you got a lot of former mujes that came in the army when they first started building up. So I couldn't tell you that number, because they've been so fully integrated, they're just Afghan national army.

You talk about folks that have actually gone through the mujahideen course, I want to say it's around the 900 amount -- it's about 900 or so. We can do about 140 at a clip, on a course, but we only run the course as required. And so I don't really have a hard, good number for you, and I apologize for that.

Q No problem. Great. Thanks for the help.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, next I'm going to call on Spencer, and then Sharon.

So Spencer, please go ahead.

Q Thanks very much, General.

Another pay question: In December, General McChrystal testified that the Taliban were paying their soldiers about \$300 a month. Unless I misheard you, you said that the increase got the base pay, for the ANA, up to \$165 per month. I was wondering if the plan is to outpace the Taliban's \$300 a month? And if so, what might some problems with getting there be? And if not, how come? GEN. HOGG: Yeah, a good question. The issue on the -- what the Taliban gets paid, you know, it -- yeah, \$300 has been a number that's thrown out there, and in some cases that's probably pretty accurate. I'll tell you, some of the high-end guys probably get paid a little bit more, based probably on jobs. Kind of like being a contractor, you get paid based on the job that you do.

With our -- with the Afghan soldiers, what we're trying to do is provide them enough money that they can take care of their families, because that's what the Afghans are really looking at -- I want to be paid enough that I can take care of my family.

And right now we are actually hitting the pay level that allows an Afghan soldier to take care of his family.

In addition to that, we've got a medical program -- they get medical treatment, to include their families. And so there's a lot of other benefits, if you will, for being a part of the Afghan national army and a part of this Afghan society that the Taliban does not have at this point. So we're not going to -- we're not in competition with the Taliban for pay. What we're trying to do is make sure that an Afghan can join the service, the army, take care of his family, and serve honorably.

And when you talk -- I just spent the afternoon over at one of our basic training and recruiting commands where, actually, the Turks are running -- the Turkish military is running a basic training, as one of our satellites. And it's amazing seeing these young recruits. They remind you of any recruiting place that you go in the States. They're highly motivated. And when you talk to these guys, you go, why did you join the army? And their response is, I joined the army because I am Afghan and I'm here to serve Afghanistan. And I see that a lot.

And so pay is important, we all know that, and right now we are able to pay them enough to take care of their families and have an honorable service. Over.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Spencer.

Now we're going to turn it over to Sharon, and then we'll wrap up to today's roundtable.

Sharon, please go ahead.

Q Hi, General. This is Sharon Weinberger, with AOL News.

I'd heard anecdotally about cases of Afghans being brought to the States for DLI, for language training, pilot training, and problems with going AWOL. Do you have any numbers on that? And is this a problem, a growing problem? Is it something that you expected? Just any sort of way you can quantify that? GEN. HOGG: (Laughs.) Okay. We're laughing in here. I've got one of my guys, he's going to go grab the numbers, because we do track that.

Before I answer the question, there was the -- on the muj integration course, the numbers, total, is 1,662 that we've trained since the program's been in effect. In this solar year we've done 419. So I just want to clear up that fact.

Okay, getting back to the Afghans that go AWOL, yes, it happens. We've had eight that have recently been reintegrated -- (laughs) -- back to Afghanistan. It is a concern for the Afghans because it's an issue of pride. It is a concern for us because these are folks that are qualified to be in these positions, and we're paying big bucks to send them -- to get education and get the language.

And I'll get you numbers here shortly. But yeah, yeah, it's a concern. That's why what we're trying to do is a lot of the language

training here in Afghanistan, and that's why we're trying to boost up the English language program. But we normally have one or two that will pop on a course, and we have a similar thing with some of the other programs.

But it is a concern. It's something that we've watched very carefully. It's something that the Afghan leadership is very concerned with as well. And so we'll continue to work it. And I will tell you, it will not be 100 percent; we will still continue to lose some folks as we continue the program. Over.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Sharon, and thank you, sir.

With that, I'm going to turn it back over to you, sir. If you'd like to end with any closing thoughts, and we'll wrap up today's roundtable. Sir, the floor is yours again.

GEN. HOGG: I will tell you, first of all, thanks for allowing me to be a part of this. I've never done this. This is the first one for me. And I appreciate the questions. They were good questions and ones that we deal with all the time.

I do have the AWOL statistics. This is for U.S.-only, for the IMAT program. Since 2002, we've had a total of 42 soldiers go AWOL, and that's out of a total of 691. So about 6.1 percent is what we're looking at, and it's kind of split between the Pashtun and Tajik, as far as the numbers.

Q Thank you.

GEN. HOGG: Okay.

Listen, we're -- we've got a great mission here. And it's a tough mission because there's a -- this is much more complicated than anything I saw in Iraq the year I was there. But we've got a lot of folks that care, and that's on the Afghan side of the house. And we're pretty optimistic about success in this mission, but it's not guaranteed. I mean, it could get derailed at any time.

But we are getting the trainers that we need here for NTMA to do the mission. The Afghans are getting it. They're starting to ante up and pull their weight. If you look at the casualty rates for the Afghan soldiers and the Afghan police, there is no doubt in my mind that they are not committed -- or that they are committed to their country. I mean, they're out there fighting, and they are dying, and they are being wounded right along with our soldiers.

And so we will continue this mission, and we appreciate the support. And we appreciate the tough questions because it keeps us honest as well, and we need to be able to have complete transparency of what we are doing here. And that's really about all I have to say, other than thank you very much. Over.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you so much, sir, for joining us today on a DOD Live Bloggers Roundtable.

Some admin remarks for everybody: You can download a transcript from today's call, when FedNews completes it, on [www.DODLive.mil](http://www.DODLive.mil). If you click on Bloggers Roundtable, you'll find a story, a transcript, and the audio file as well.

With that, thank you so much, sir.

You've been listening to Major General David Hogg -- I apologize for pronouncing it wrong at the beginning of the roundtable -- Deputy Commander-Army, NATO Training Mission-Army.

Thank you so much, sir, for joining us today. This concludes today's Roundtable.

Q General, thanks very much.

GEN. HOGG: My pleasure.

Q Thank you, General.

END.